RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

LEAFLETS
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No. 27 April, 1940

ARBUTUS MENZIESII
MADROÑO

Prepared
by
RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
of the
NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

No. 27 April 19, 1940

ARBUTUS MENZIESII

MADROÑO

Ericaceae Heath Family

Evergreen tree up to 120 ft. high, often equally broad; trunk 3 to 12 ft. in diam.; bark smooth, reddish-brown, exfoliating, except on base of old trunks becoming rough and fissured. New shoots and inflorescence arising from terminal buds covered by sheathing bracts which function as leaves for a short period. Leaves alternate, entire or toothed when young, leathery, glossy dark green above, glaucous beneath, narrowly elliptical, 3 to 6 in. long, on petioles 1 in. long. Inflorescence a terminal panicle composed of 6 to 10 dense racemes. Flowers fragrant, white, on hairy pedicels ¼ in. long; calyx 5-parted, inconspicuous; corolla 5-lobed at summit, about 3/16 in. long, urn-shaped, conspicuously restricted at middle, 10 semi-transparent glands at base, lightly hairy only within; stamens 10, less than half as high as corolla, filaments hairy, anthers opening by 2 terminal pores and bearing 2 awn-like appendages; ovary 5-celled, on a raised disc, style undivided, reaching to summit of corolla. Fruit a warty, fleshy berry about ¼ in. thick, red, reddish-orange or orange, containing numerous brown seeds. In germination the cotyledons are entire, appear above ground; the first few later leaves are toothed.

The genus Arbutus (Latin name of the Arbute tree) consists of over 15 species of the Mediterranean region and North America. A. arizonica and texana of the U.S. extend into Mexico. A. Unedo, the Strawberry Tree, native of the Mediterranean region, is common in California gardens.

Arbutus Menziesii was described in 1814 by Pursh, an American botanist. The species name honors Archibald Menzies, botanist of Vancouver's famous voyage of discovery which explored the north-west coast of North America from 1792 to 94. Menzies was thus the first botanist to collect along these shores. The exact place where Menzies obtained his specimens of the Madroño (a Spanish name) is not known. Fortunately, this lack of a definite locality has caused no confusion, for the botanical features of the tree are comparatively uniform throughout its range. Only one other name has been proposed, A. procera, by Douglas, but this has never become generally known or used and has for a century been regarded as a synonym.

The Madroño has a widespread distribution on the Pacific Coast. From British Columbia to Central California it is an abundant tree of the Coast Ranges, reaching its greatest development

in Northern California. It is widespread in the Sierras, but is not abundant. In Southern California it is a rarity, being known as far south as San Diego Co. Pure stands of the Madroño are seldom found, but it is often a conspicuous component of the Tan-Oak, Douglas Oak or Douglas-Fir belts of the Transition Zone where the rainfall is well in excess of 25 in. per year. Its usual habitat is in coarse soil where drainage is good. When growing in the open the individuals develop broad, round crowns, while in narrow canyons or when close to other trees it is tall and slender. Many magnificent old trees are known. One of the largest is near Ettersburg, Humboldt Co., and is called the "Council Madroño". In July, 1939 we measured it and found it to be about 85 ft. high, 110 ft. in spread and with a trunk 12 ft. in diam. at the smallest point between the flaring butt and the first massive branches.

There is probably no broad-leaved evergreen on the Pacific Coast which is more beautiful than the Madroño. Its glossy, dark green foliage and its rich brown bark make a fitting background for the fragrant white flowers which appear from April to June, and the rich red or orange-red fruits which mature in November and December. In regions where the tree is common these fruits are favorite Christmas decorations.

The Madroño is valued as a source of firewood, charcoal for gunpowder and for furniture. Wild trees cut for these uses promptly stump sprout and the second growth is rapid and beautiful. It is likely that eventually this tree will be most valued as an ornamental, but at present is little known in California gardens, possibly because the trees are not generally available in the nurseries and because wild seedlings are difficult to transplant.

Propagation of the Madroño is by fruits gathered in the late fall, crushed to remove the pulp around the seeds, then planted in winter or early spring in seed beds or boxes. Seedlings appear in early spring and should be transplanted when about 1 in. high to containers(preferably tin cans or large square tar paper pots to avoid coiled roots). At the end of the first season the plants will be from 4 to 12 in. high and should then be set out in their permanent locations. Our experience indicates that this tree should thrive under average garden conditions when given ample water and a well drained location. Our trees have averaged from 2 to 6 ft. of growth per year and are beautiful at all times except for a short period in early summer when the old leaves turn brown and hang for a few weeks before dropping.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted to the growth and study of the native plants of California for their botanical, horticultural and popular features.

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